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DLCC 2016 – Report from a Scientific Conference in Cieszyn/Ustroń, Poland, 2016

The subject matter and the priorities of the conference reflect the conceptual principles underlying the modernisation of education and the reform of the educational systems in European countries, as well as national development strategies for the 21st century. One of the European Union's key educational objectives is the provision of equal opportunities for all with respect to an access to learning and knowledge, regardless of gender, financial and physical ability, and place of residence. Consequently, distance learning has now been granted a status of high priority. If introduced on a wide scale, distance learning and teaching may make a significant contribution towards the achievement of educational goals in member states.

The Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education at the University of Silesia, Poland has extensive experience in the implementation of distance learning in other departments across the university. The Faculty's Distance Learning Platform operates smoothly and continues to expand. The conference is designed to bring together all those involved in e-learning – university students, faculty staff, and educators – to explore and share experiences with e-learning and distance learning, both at home and abroad. The partners and co-organisers of the previous editions of the conference held between 2009–2013 include the University of Ostrava (the Czech Republic), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (the Slovak Republic), Silesian University in Opava (the Czech Republic), and Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (the Slovak Republic), which are also involved in many activities in the field of e-learning and ICT, in particular within the framework of their jointly participated project “E-learning as a road to communicating in the multicultural environment,” supported by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). Among our participants, there were also researchers and scientists from different countries.

The strengthening and widening of international cooperation resulted in starting another international scientific project, IRNet – “International Research Network for study and development of new tools and methods for advanced pedagogical science in the field of ICT instruments, e-learning and intercultural competences” (www.irnet.us.edu.pl), financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme, within the Marie Curie Actions International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (2014–2017), with participating 10 universities from 9 countries: the University of Silesia in Katowice (US, Poland) (Coordinator), the University of Twente (UT, the Netherlands), the University of Extremadura (UEX, Spain), Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (UKF, Slovakia), Lisbon Lusíada University (LU, Portugal), the University of Ostrava (OU, the Czech Republic), Curtin University in Perth (CU, Australia), Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University (BGKU, Ukraine), Dneprodzerzhinsk State Technical University (DSTU, Ukraine), Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, St. Petersburg (HSPU, Russian Federation). Therefore, the 8th Annual Conference DLCC2016 was organised with support of numerous partner universities from West, Central, East Europe, Australia and of course with participation of speakers from different countries.

The topics of the conference included:

1. **E-learning methodology – implementation and evaluation:**

- European and national standards of e-learning quality evaluation;
- evaluation of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning, methodology, and good practice;
- MOOCs – methodology of design, conducting, implementation, and evaluation; and
- contemporary trends of world education – globalisation, internationalisation, mobility.

2. **ICT tools – effective use of education:**

- selected Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 tools;
- Massive Open Online Courses, etc.;
- social media;
- comparing and evaluating LMS (learning management systems), CMS (Content Management Systems);
- VSCR (Virtual synchronous classrooms), SSA (Screen Share Applications), CSA (Content Sharing Application);
- cloud computing environment;
- multimedia resources and didactic materials; and
- video-tutorial design.

3. **E-learning and intercultural competences development in different countries:**

- legal and social aspects of distance learning in different countries;
- psychological and ethical aspects of distance learning in different countries;
- teacher-student and student-student relationships in distance learning;

- theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of distance learning;
 - successful examples of e-learning;
 - distance learning of humanities: native and foreign language, philosophy, history, etc.;
 - distance learning of science and mathematics;
 - quality of teaching, training programmes and assessment; and
 - e-learning for persons with disabilities.
4. **Distance learning and lifelong learning:**
- computer training, for prospective and actual teachers, in distance learning;
 - lifelong learning supported by distance learning; and
 - personnel, scientific, information, and library services.
5. **E-learning in the development of the key competencies:**
- key competencies in the knowledge society;
 - use of e-learning in improving the level of the students' key competencies; and
 - teachers' and learners' competencies in distance learning and computer science.
6. **Other alternative methods, forms, and techniques in distance learning:**
- simulations, models in distance learning;
 - collaboration work in distance learning;
 - distance learning systems; and
 - m-learning.

This year's conference took place on 10–11 October 2016 in Ustroń. It was the 8th edition of the international scientific conference *Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning* (the subtitle of this year's conference was *E-learning Methodology – Implementation and Evaluation*) under the auspices of the Rector of the University of Silesia prof. dr hab. A. Kowalczyk, the Dean of the Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education prof. dr hab. Z. Gajdzica, and the Director of the Institute of Sciences of Education dr hab. prof. UŚ K. Śleziński.

Co-organisers of the conference were: the University of Ostrava, Silesian University in Opava, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the University of Extremadura, the University of Twente, Lisbon Lusíada University, Curtin University in Perth, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, St. Petersburg, Dneprodzerzhinsk State Technical University.

Participants and guests were solemnly welcomed by the Conference Coordinator, prof. E. Smyrnova-Trybulska, who presented a brief history of the conference, its aim, subject matter and programme, partners within the framework of the IRNet project (Figure 1), co-organisers, and conference guests. Welcoming remarks were also delivered by the Director of the Institute of Educational Sciences prof. K. Śleziński.

The conference was attended by participants from the following countries: Austria, Australia, the Czech Republic, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The first day of the conference consisted of three sessions: one plenary and two thematic ones. During the plenary session, the

following lectures were delivered: “Virtual and Contextual Mobile Learning Through Empathic Technologies” by prof. P. Isaías from the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, and “Education, Culture and Technology; Triangle for Developing Higher Education” by prof. P. Kommers of the University of Twente, the Netherlands. During the plenary session, there were also delivered papers “Philosophizing with Children Using Open Educational Resources (OER)” by doctor F. Feiner from the Catholic Pedagogical University, Graz (Austria), “Openness and Quality of E-educational University Environment” by prof. N. Morze from the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine, Vice-rector for Informatisation, and the lecture “About Skills in the School of the Future” by prof. A. dos Reis, the Director of the Graal Institute (Portugal).

The next two conference sessions, which included 13 speeches, were led by doctor R. Makhachashvili (Ukraine) and doctor M. Roszak (Poland). The first conference day also featured a videoconference and an e-round table debate “E-learning and Open Education Quality – a Comparison of European, National, Internal Standards and Regulations,” led by prof. A. Dos Reis, prof. E. Smyrnova-Trybulska, and doctor M. Roszak. The videoconference was attended by experts from different universities of different countries: prof. N. Morze, Borys Grinchenko Kiev University (Ukraine), prof. P. Kommers, University of Twente, Professor UNESCO (the Netherlands), doctor Tomayess Issa, Curtin University in Perth (Australia), prof. G. Delicado Puerto, University of Extremadura (Spain), prof. A. dos Reis, the Graal Institute (Portugal), doctor F. Feiner, Catholic Pedagogical University in Graz (Austria), doc. dr J. Malach, Ostrava University (the Czech Republic), doc. dr E. Piwowska, Warsaw University of Technology (Poland).

On the second day of the conference, two conference sessions were held, led by dr B. Kołodziejczyk, mgr R. Kalamarz (Poland), and dr M. Hruby (the Czech Republic). The presentations delivered during the two sessions included the following: “Wiki Tool in Higher Education: An Australian Perspective” by Tomayess Issa, Theodora Issa, and Touma Issa (Australia); “Teacher–Student Collaboration: Challenges and Opportunities” by N. Morze, R. Makhachashvili (Ukraine), E. Smyrnova-Trybulska (Poland), and H. Pavlova (Ukraine); “Foreign Language Competence Supported by Distance Learning” by M. Hrubý (the Czech Republic); “Development of Intercultural Competence with ICT Tools – Proposals, Implementation and Evaluation” by B. Grabowska, A. Szafrńska-Gajdzica, Ł. Kwadrans, and E. Ogrodzka-Mazur (Poland); “Individualized Teaching Process for Pupils with Moderate Mental Disability” by L. Klubal and K. Kostolányová (the Czech Republic); “Robots in Elementary School: Some Educational, Legal and Technical Aspects” by E. Smyrnova-Trybulska (Poland), N. Morze (Ukraine), W. Zuziak (Poland), and M. Gladun (Ukraine); “Information and Communication Technologies in Education Management” by P. Żebro (Poland); “Well-being as Context of ICT Development and Research” by R. Stefańska-Klar (Poland); and other presentations.

Also, on 11 October a videoconference and an e-round table debate “Teacher’s Skills for the 21st Century Teaching,” led by prof. A. Dos Reis, were held. During the videoconference, the following lectures were presented: “Preparing and Presenting Contents” by F. Carrera, Lisbon Technical University (Portugal); “On-line Tutoring” by X. Basogain, University of the Basque Country (Spain), “Formative Assessment” by T. Noskova, T. Pavlova, and O. Yakovleva, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (Russia); “About LMS” by Tomayess Issa, Curtin University in Perth (Australia); “Virtual Classroom Technology” by S. Cubo, University of Extramadura (Spain), “Conclusions and Recommendations” by P. Pinto, Lusiada University, Lisbon (Portugal). Experts and participants of the videoconference and the e-round table took part in an interesting debate, and presented on the international forum their own experience and some research results on “Teacher’s Skills for the 21st Century Teaching.”

Undoubtedly, a valuable event is the workshop organised every year within the framework of the conference. This year there was a particularly interesting workshop on “Effective use of mobile technology for learning and teaching,” which was led by dr L. Klubal (the Czech Republic). This year’s edition of the Cieszyn conference was full of important topics, interestingly formulated problems, and suggestions of methodological and pedagogical practical solutions. As a follow-up to the conference, the best articles prepared by the participants of the conference were published in the monograph *E-learning Methodology – Implementation and Evaluation*. E. Smynova-Trybulska (Ed.). Vol. 8. 2016. Katowice/Cieszyn: Studio Noa for University of Silesia.

The conference encouraged the exchange of experiences, strengthening international cooperation, joint problem solving, implementation of innovative methodologies, creation of a European global educational space. With the contribution of the conference content, the scientific community indicated a considerable opportunity to support education with professional solutions in the scope of e-learning methodology, its implementation and evaluation. At the end of the conference, a photograph of all the participants was taken (Figure 2).



Figure 1. The participants of the European IRNet Project www.irnet.us.edu.pl and the international scientific conference *Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning* (the subtitle of this year's conference: *E-learning Methodology – Implementation and Evaluation* (www.DLCC.us.edu.pl)), October 2016, Ustroń, Poland.



Figure 2. The participants of the international scientific conference *Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning* (the subtitle of this year's conference: *E-learning Methodology – Implementation and Evaluation* (DLCC2016)), October 2016, Ustroń, Poland.